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CONCORD

## Where the ice meets the brush

Artist creates painting for Black Ice tourney

By [Sarah M. Earle](#) / [For the Monitor](#)  
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In Mark Ruddy's painting "The Spirit of Hobey Baker," the hockey players are in the background while the young spectators in their brightly colored snowsuits and hats get center stage.

"I wanted to capture the feeling of the whole festival," said Ruddy, unrolling one of the poster prints being sold to raise money for the second annual Black Ice Pond Hockey Tournament.

But talking to Ruddy it's easy to see that those children with their hockey sticks and skates have a personal significance too.

Ruddy discovered his two great passions - hockey and art - at an early age. He learned the sport on the pond at White Park before Concord even had an indoor rink, and when he wasn't in school that's usually where he could be found.

"I spent my whole childhood over at the park," said Ruddy, whose open face seems to retain traces of that boy. "I was there pretty much every day of my childhood."

As his love for hockey developed, so did Ruddy's artistic talent. Evenings found him sketching his favorite hockey players, or scenes from his daily surroundings.

Like many people, though, Ruddy eventually had to choose between his passions. He majored in art at the University of New Hampshire, and after graduation he left Concord - and hockey - behind. "I realized if I wanted to make it as an artist I had to move to New York or someplace," he said.

After a few years as a freelance illustrator, when he also got married and had a son, Ruddy carved out a successful career painting murals in people's homes. He lived in the Hamptons for 20 years, until family matters drew him back to his childhood home.

When his aging father fell and broke his back while trying to fix a leak in the roof seven years ago, Ruddy and his wife, Kathy, rushed to Concord to care for him. For two years, Ruddy made the grueling weekly commute between New York and Concord, while his wife began to put down roots here, volunteering as a substitute teacher in the Concord School District. After his father passed away, Ruddy's wife persuaded him to stay here.

They now live in the same home where Ruddy grew up, surrounded by Ruddy's paintings, his father's woodwork, and

treasured pieces of art by his grandmother and mother, who both discovered their artistic talent late in life and both died young.

Here in Concord, Ruddy has sustained his art career, teaching art at NHTI and maintaining a few clients in New York during the summer months. He also continues to paint and exhibit: He just wrapped up a show at the Thanassi Gallery in Provincetown, Mass.

Here, Ruddy has also rediscovered his love for hockey. He plays in an indoor men's league, and when the inaugural Black Ice Pond Hockey Tournament came to his beloved park last year, he immediately became involved.

"It was such a thrill because I grew up here playing hockey," Ruddy said. "And the big thrill was getting to play against the governor."

After last year's tournament, one of the organizers approached Ruddy about doing a painting that could be used as a fundraiser for this year's event, which will take place Jan. 27-29. Working from dozens of photographs his wife took at the tournament, Ruddy produced a 48-by-28-inch, oil-on-canvas painting that he hopes captures the essence of that festive day. Posters of the print are on sale now at Rowland's Studio and the Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce for \$25 apiece, and larger prints that are truer in color to the original can be purchased for \$225. The original is also for sale for \$4,000 (for purchasing details, visit [blackicepondhockey.com](http://blackicepondhockey.com)).

Ruddy also donated a giant polar bear sculpture he had made for a display in New York to serve as the tournament mascot. Now outfitted with a hockey shirt, gloves and stick, the 8-foot bear will be making the rounds to local bars where the new Black Ice Ale is now on tap.

Ruddy is also working on the hockey sticks that will be awarded to the winning team from each division, lettering the sides with an old-fashioned looking script and giving them an antiqued finish so they resemble the hockey sticks of Hobey Baker's era.

Baker, who went on to become America's first hockey star, got his start at St. Paul's School, the birthplace of hockey here in the United States. He makes an appearance in Ruddy's painting, standing off to one side, his black-and-white attire contrasting with the bright colors of his counterparts.

It's the vividly dressed children, though, that capture the eye and hint at the painter's story. "It was the first time since I was a kid that I combined my two passions," Ruddy said.

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